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ABSTRACT

This study explored the feasibility of using the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) teacher assessment and certification process as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve professional culture and teaching quality in low-performing schools. Data from surveys of NBPTS California Support Network members were used to generate structured interview protocols for six key informant categories (NBPTS certified teachers, National Board candidates, administrators at low-performing schools, district professional development personnel, teacher union representatives, and NBPTS support providers). Interviews highlighted reasons for pursuing board certification, challenges, support, school reform efforts, leadership, the process teachers commit to when pursuing board certification, benefits of board certification, and usefulness of the NBPTS process). Challenges included instability in students lives, inability to demonstrate excellence, frequent teacher and administrator turnover, and difficulty engaging parents. Respondents voiced concern about the district-wide trend to use highly scripted curricula and instructional materials. However, they were generally optimistic. They identified the need for a systemic approach that recognized and engaged with the larger context in which low-performing school systems are nested. They noted the need for school and district administrators to understand and support the NBPTS tenets and certification process. The interview protocols are appended. (SM)

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"An Enormous Untapped Potential":

A Study of the Feasibility of Using National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification to Improve Low-Performing Schools

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With assistance from Tenley Harrison

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WestEd

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the feasibility of using the teacher assessment and certification process of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) as the centerpiece of a comprehensive strategy to improve the professional culture and quality of teaching in low-performing schools. Specifically, the study attempts to answer two basic questions related to this exploration:

1. What are the particular challenges and concerns identified by National Board (NB) candidates, certified teachers, school and district administrators, and support providers who have been closely involved with the NB process in low-performing schools?

2. What potential strategies and leverage points might be considered to increase the likelihood of success in using the NB process in low-performing schools?

These two questions are of particular concern to WestEd, as it is currently launching a pilot effort with two high-poverty schools in Northern California that will use the NB assessment process as an organizing strategy for inquiry, reflection, and professional growth. Additionally, several teacher professional development organizations are attempting to tap the potential of the NB assessment process in their school development efforts. This study should contribute insights that can inform and improve those efforts currently underway or being planned.

Methodology

A brief questionnaire was developed and administered to a group of 25 NBPTS California Support Network members on March 20, 2001. The two-page instrument asked a series of brief questions, consisting of yes/no, Likert-scale, and open-response items, and served to identify themes for exploration and to recruit support provider informants. (See Appendices A through C for instrument, detailed analysis, and summary of results). These findings, along with an analysis of WestEd's proposed intervention strategy, were used to generate structured interview protocols for six key informant categories:

School level:

1. National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs)
2. National Board Candidates (NBCs)
3. School administrators at low-performing schools that have NBCTs and/or NBCs

District level:

4. District administrators (professional development personnel)
5. Teacher union representatives

Other:

6. NBPTS support providers (affiliated with institutions of higher education, districts, county offices of education, or independent contractors)

Interview protocols were drafted, reviewed internally, revised, piloted, and finalized. (See Appendix D for interview protocols.) Support providers were interviewed first, and were asked to help identify potential NBCT and NBC informants who currently work or had worked at low-performing schools across the state. The protocols were used by two researchers to conduct hour-long, structured interviews with 27 informants between July 7 and October 24, 2001. Although a few interviews were conducted face-to-face, the great majority were conducted by telephone. All telephone interviews were key-entered during the interview, while face-to-face interviews were later transcribed. All interview notes were reviewed and finalized shortly thereafter, and follow-up calls for clarification were conducted when necessary.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of interviews by informant type. It also lists the target and actual number of interviews for each group. Of note is that fewer district representatives and site administrators were interviewed than planned. In both instances, it was difficult to find district and school administrators who were both knowledgeable about the NB process and willing to be interviewed. Turnover did play a role in this. In fact, the two school administrators who were interviewed had already left the low-performing schools they were at in the 2000–01 school year (discussed below). Nevertheless, given that some support providers were former school administrators or current district employees, the research team believed that these informant perspectives could be adequately represented.

Table 1. Distribution of Interviews and Questionnaires

Informant Type		Data Collection Method			
		In-person Interview	Phone Interview	Question-naire (n=25)	Target: Actual
NBPTS Support Provider					8:7
District Representative				n/a	3:1
SCHOOL	NB Certified Teachers at Low-Performing Schools			n/a	10:7
	NB Candidates at LPSs			n/a	10:9
	Principals w/ NBCTs or Candidates on site			n/a	4:2
Teacher Union Representative				n/a	2:1

All transcripts were re-read by both researchers and a research assistant, and key themes emerging from the interviews were identified in two half-day debriefing sessions. Interview transcripts were then coded by theme, and salient quotes were selected to highlight the theme or issue identified.

While such a small and opportunistic sample cannot be considered representative or generalizable to the state, there was strong consistency and convergence around key issues and themes both within and across informant groups. This lends confidence to our conclusion that the findings discussed are meaningful and worthy of consideration.

Overview of National Board Certification

Since National Board (NB) certification is a central focus of this study, a brief review of the Board's origins, purpose, and certifications is worth providing here. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization created in 1987 in response to the 1983 President's Commission on Excellence in Education report, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.* The Board's mission is to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a national voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards, and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning. The Board's long-term plan calls for 33 certificates in 15 content areas distributed across six developmental levels to be made available (see summary table in Appendix E).

The National Board is governed by a 63-member board of directors, the majority of whom are classroom teachers. Others include school administrators, school board members, governors and state legislators, higher education leaders, and representatives from teacher unions and disciplinary organizations along with business and community leaders.

Standards for each certificate are developed by a standards committee of teachers and others in the profession representing a national cross-section from the discipline of the certificate. Following adoption of the standards by the National Board, the general contractor for NBPTS (ETS) develops and pilots an assessment based on the standards. Currently there are 24 different certificates available for candidates in the 2001–2002 school year. The certificates available cover almost 90% of the eligible teaching population.

The process of earning National Board certification is rigorous. It involves assembling a portfolio of one's teaching practice providing evidence to meet four portfolio entry requirements. Evidence includes unedited videotapes of classroom teaching, student work samples, and written commentaries analyzing how the evidence provided meets the teaching standards for the certificate. Teachers must also attend an assessment center where their subject-matter knowledge is probed in six 30-minute exercises. Entries and exercises are scored by National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) or teachers who qualify to become candidates for the certificate being scored.

Candidates have four to five months to complete the portfolio portion of the assessment and are given a window of two to three weeks in which to take the assessment exercises. Assessment centers are located nationally and internationally.

Candidates have up to three years to achieve certification once they have submitted their initial application. In year one, the portfolio entries need to be completed along with attendance at the assessment center. If the overall score of the combined portfolio entries and assessment center exercises does not reach the performance standard, the candidate has the option of "banking" successful entries and/or exercises and retaking any part of the assessment needed to raise their overall score. In the view of the National Board, the retake of an entry or exercise provides candidates an opportunity to continue to look at their teaching and grow professionally.

NB certification is voluntary. It is open to teachers pre-K–12 who have a baccalaureate degree, have at least three years of teaching experience (public or private), and have a state teaching license or teach in an accredited school. While state licensing is for the entry-level teacher, NB certification is for experienced teachers who wish to demonstrate their accomplished practice. A National Board certificate is valid for ten years and may be renewed at the end of that time in a process asking NBCTs to provide evidence of how they continue to meet the NBPTS standards for their certificate.

Teachers note that the process of earning certification is challenging, and many say it is the best professional development they have experienced. Teachers routinely rate the process as more powerful than that of advanced university coursework or short-term trainings, citing the sustained analysis and reflection of their teaching practice required to meet portfolio entry requirements.

Structure of Report Findings

The next two sections report on the circumstances, issues, and dynamics that make pursuing NB certification at low-performing schools particularly challenging, as well as the potential strategies and leverage points for making NB certification a viable means of school improvement, as identified by informants. Both of these dimensions were thoroughly explored in the interviews, and are presented below sequentially. The number and range of challenges discussed may convey strong pessimism regarding the viability of using NB certification at all in low-performing schools. However, none of the informants from any group ruled out NB certification as a potent organizing framework and method for improving both the culture and teaching quality of low-performing schools. In fact, most explicitly voiced their belief in and support for these notions, and virtually all were committed to using that NB system to serve teachers and students at low-performing schools. While their reflections and analyses offer a very frank, clear-eyed assessment of the challenges that must be engaged, their thoughtful strategies and leverage points also indicate how to increase the likelihood of success.

Challenges and concerns in pursuing NB certification in low-performing schools

Informants identified a number of circumstances, issues, and dynamics that make pursuing the NB certification in low-performing schools particularly challenging. Some

of these issues were considered unique to low-performing schools, while others were considered to be common among all schools but of greater intensity for low-performing ones.

Understanding the context of low-performing schools is critical.

Informants noted that the context of a low-performing school is particularly critical when considering a strategy that uses National Board certification as a framework for intervention and professional growth. Among the many issues they identified, the following were most often cited.

Instability and unpredictability are more prevalent in low-performing schools.

A number of informants noted that low-performing schools — which are almost always high-poverty schools — suffer much greater degrees of instability and unpredictability. In particular, they mentioned the continual turnover of students, teaching staff, and administrators as sources of much disruption. For example, many candidates noted that students' mobility and non-cognitive issues (e.g., physical and mental health, family health and economics) often undermined their ability to showcase in their video entries students making academic progress. "You get students moving around quite a bit," explained one candidate. "I had a number of students I wanted to use for work samples who weren't there for the post-[test]." Some tracked and documented the work of several students to hedge against these sudden disappearances, all of which increased the effort required. Several other candidates noted proportionally more high-needs students in their classrooms that would present behavioral problems during videotaping. The resulting disruptions often required retaping entire videoed lessons since editing is not permitted under Board rules. An NBCT recalled, "I had a girl with difficult behavioral problems. Her mom was in and out of hospital; she'd suddenly go off, or get up and look out [the] window, and I did not want to submit a video with that behavior in it. I did do a lot to try to address behavioral issues, but I did not videotape [in that class]."

As one support provider related, "Those in low-performing schools are fighting a different fight than those not in low-performing schools. This [candidate] was working with minority kids, low SES kids; trying to make the school a safe place; trying to find support for kids without family support; working on after-school programs to provide needed physical, emotional, and academic support for the students." This was also emphasized by a large urban district official, who stated: "In low-performing schools, we know the working environment can be a big issue: If people are worried about safety, discipline, and crime, then good teaching won't happen."

Several candidates also cited teacher and administrator turnover as a significant pressure. One candidate noted that a third of the teachers at her school were new to the school and the profession, while another third had been teaching less than five years. As a more veteran teacher, this generated significant mentoring demands for her even while she pursued NB certification. Another candidate related that her school had had four principals in four years. Such rapid leadership changes brought with them very different

leadership visions, styles, and priorities for the staff (discussed below). "Staff are just hanging by a thread without that leadership, trying to provide cohesion and alignment," she explained. "It doesn't happen unless you have a strong leader. You get burned out." These rapid changes also increased the uncertainty of teaching assignments. As one candidate said with irony a week before her year-round track began, "This is the wonderful thing about being in a low-performing school: I don't even know what grade I'm teaching next year! We have many changes from year to year."

NB candidates often play multiple, critical roles at their schools.

A clear message emerging from virtually all informant interviews, regardless of informant type, was that teachers that choose to pursue NB certification very often also play multiple roles that are of critical need to their schools. As a district administrator noted, "Teachers who are NB candidates have high visibility at their school site as leaders. The most daunting issue is taking time away from their school leadership positions." These multiple role demands are particularly pressing among NB candidates at low-performing schools. One candidate described a typical experience:

> "I'm a veteran teacher, and was required to lead and mentor my grade-level team, both the bilingual and English-Only strands. I had two new teachers in first grade, so there was a lot of work for me to bring them up to speed, drive the curriculum, set the pace, explain things.... This was a lot of extra planning outside of school hours — staying late after school, meeting on weekends — for the tight teaming need to align the curriculum. I did all that in addition [to] my [NB] application!"

Other candidates wrote grants, ran departments, and led program innovations while pursuing certification. These roles — new teacher mentor and peer support provider, instructional leader at a grade level (in elementary schools) or department (in secondary schools), and lead implementer of school- or districtwide reforms — are often seen as vital and non-negotiable by site administrators. As one stated, "With our district, so much [reform activity] was rolling down, I could not have our teacher leaders [who were candidates] do less; we would have suffered." (Of note is that this principal also expressed the belief that teachers pursuing NB certification should be given half-time assignments as a kind of "semi-sabbatical.")

While several candidates and NBCTs took on the NB assessment as an additional set of tasks that impinged on personal time, for others, it generated tension at school as the demands of pursuing NB certification pressed on candidates' professional time and attention. As one support provider reflected, "In some ways National Boards...could be construed as a selfish thing to do." Some NBCTs explicitly noted that during their candidacy year(s), they had to cut back on their mentoring and participation in reform efforts. Several expressed frustration and guilt at doing so, yet described it as an up-front cost for a longer-term benefit to the school. Said one NBCT, "Having gone through the NB process and having observed and looked at my teaching process critically, I can do teacher support work more effectively." Others saw pursuing certification in a more

positive light: "Pursuing Board certification presents a perfect opportunity to get involved; in and of itself, going through Board process is contributing to school reform."

More difficult was the sense, expressed by some, that the NB process impinged on their time dedicated to preparing their classes. "The challenge was balancing completion of the process and maintaining my commitment to students in my role as a teacher," related one candidate. "Many times I felt I was neglecting the students and the appropriate lessons I thought they should be receiving. Sometimes I haphazardly put a lesson together which was different from my normal way of going about teaching. That was a struggle for me."

Virtually all candidates noted that the understanding and public support of the school site administrators was critical in allowing them to pursue the NB assessment.

Many members of low-performing schools express concern in being able to demonstrate excellence.

Emerging from these structured interviews was a cluster of themes related to the adverse effects on staff and students of the stigmatizing "low-performing school" label. These effects were reflected in several observations related to teachers' expectations of students, teachers' sense of confidence and self-efficacy, students' behaviors and beliefs, and school morale. These are relevant because they can in turn fuel doubt and resistance to the idea that schoolwide excellence is possible, and that NB certification is a viable means to achieve it.

One support provider articulated the issue in this way:

> "The biggest challenge for candidates in low-performing schools is the mindset. People from these schools continually say, 'My kids don't perform at the level that other school's kids do.' It's a constant struggle to get them to understand it's not about making their kids into something they're not; it's about taking them from where they are and pushing them as far as they can go....Teachers somehow think they have to show that their kids are performing at the highest level....The thought is 'I'm not [NB] certifiable, because my kids aren't in the 90th percentile.' The key is how far we can move them, help them improve....This is the part we haven't done well yet."

The fact that students are low performing led several candidates to note that quality NB entries are harder to produce, though they still believed they could do so. One NBCT recalled, "I did it to show that this could be done with the lowest-performing students. My experience shows me that with highest-performing students, your portfolio scores will naturally be better because these students are more articulate, and look better performing; it's easier to use their work to show what you're trying to get. Teaching the big concepts and connecting them over assignments is a lot less stressful [with high-performing students] because they make you look good."

This teacher noted that students who are low performing can internalize these low expectations, and this can in turn affect their willingness to participate. She described her experience with high school students:

> "Class discussion is extremely difficult to do with low-performing kids in high school. They've been pounded by [the] system quite a bit by the time they reach high school. Getting them to put forth their ideas in class is not easy — they receive ridicule from peers. It doesn't have to be that way, but in high school, for the lowest-performing kids, they've learned …to keep their mouth shut and don't show what they don't know, so they'll pass through the system. A negative expectation is built for kids bordering on failing in the system, so they're less willing to come forth."

In addition to the students, several informants noted that candidates, in producing video entries, need to continually confront weaknesses in their own teaching and be willing to reflect critically on their practices and have others do so also. Many candidates in low-performing schools reported finding this particularly difficult and painful to do, especially as many of them intentionally chose to teach at low-performing schools out of a deep moral commitment to provide a quality education for these underserved students. "At points it was very frustrating, and I wondered if I was doing the right thing for my students," explained one candidate. "You're not feeling like a fabulous teacher all the time, because you're reflecting on what you're not doing well all the time." Another noted, "I began to wonder, 'Have I been living up to these standards?'…I have never had to evaluate myself this way." This sense of increased doubt becomes compounded when external performance indicator systems — which typically define low-performing status — are the main focus of accountability and judging worth. (This issue is discussed below under external factors.) As a support provider put it, "Low-performing schools [are] where teachers feel the biggest strain. There's always someone telling them they're doing a poor job. The school may be under performing, but that doesn't mean you are."

Interestingly, a number of informants noted the positive effects on morale of their fellow staff and their students when candidates did become certified. One NBCT who works at a school where several other peers have been certified commented: "[Our being certified] has raised our self-esteem; we're this dumpy ghetto school that has all these great teachers. Maybe this is a way to raise a school's self-esteem." Several candidates and NBCTs also noted that their students become more engaged and identified with the candidate *as a result of* the process. As one NBCT described what happened to her high school students, who had been identified by other teachers in the school as "rejects; low performing": "[National Boards] became important because the students really bought into [teacher's pursuing certification], and supported me in it. The students didn't understand what it all meant, but they still felt proud and validated that they had a teacher that achieved certification. It gave them pride. They felt ownership because my certification was connected to their performance."

Accessing and engaging parents is seen as more difficult.

Candidates at low-performing schools faced additional challenges with the NB expectation of parental and community involvement. One support provider who had been an NBCT at a low-performing school said, "Parent outreach at a low-performing school is quite low. Normally, teachers can get great participation, but at a low-performing school there's a bigger challenge. My school had 1,100 students, but we might have 10 parents come to a meeting. Thinking of my candidates, that happened to all of them. It's not that they didn't make the effort; it's that teachers had to do much more to get these parents involved — more attempts, and stronger attempts." Another support provider and NBCT noted that economic factors affected parent participation: "With the Board standard on family involvement, and outreach to community," she explained, "I had to help families to understand what I was doing. That was a challenge at a low-performing school, especially if parents must be working, and cannot take time off from work to come to the classroom." A third support provider contrasted this with what she saw happening to candidates in high-performing schools: "In schools that are high performing…you're actually fighting parents off sometimes, and they cause you to be looking over your shoulder." She noted that these parents were seen as a much easier resource to engage in support of the candidate's efforts.

Interestingly, several teachers looked beyond family accessibility and cited teacher turnover as a factor inhibiting the building of trust with families. Given that parents need to sign consent forms for their children to be video-filmed for entries, this trust-building is essential and needs to begin before candidacy. In addition, several noted that the NB process motivated candidates to engage in more effective outreach to parents and community. As one NBCT reflected on her experience, "I [now] do a lot of parent contact. The NB process made me realize community and parent involvement is very important in the learning process. With 150 students per year in secondary, you need to reach that many parents. I now make a point to contact parents of students who don't come to class or don't do the homework. And it's working."

Potential exists to create status distinctions between certified and non-certified teachers.

Informants brought to light another challenge with implementing the NB process as the centerpiece of a schoolwide change effort. As one support provider expressed it, "There could be a lot of fallout for teachers that are successful versus those who aren't in pursuing certification. That would have to be dealt with well at the beginning, clarifying that some teachers are more ready than others." Another support provider echoed that idea, commenting that a potential pitfall may be "setting up groups [of teachers in a school] that are certified versus not certified." She also noted "It can be painful opening up [one's] classroom practices…it's very personal, and can be emotionally scarring if not done sensitively." Several informants suggested that a staged process be implemented so that teachers could participate at several levels, from awareness to pre-candidacy through candidacy and certification. (This is discussed in the subsequent section on strategies.)

Procuring needed hardware and technical support is more challenging.

As a practical matter, candidates at low-performing schools often noted their difficulties procuring the hardware and technical support necessary for the candidacy process, including such items as video cameras, omni-directional microphones, and assistance with videotaping and sound recording. One candidate voiced her frustration: "Five teachers at our school were doing National Board and there was only one video camera. I borrowed my brother's camera. The school purchased two omni-directional mikes which was a help. Also I had difficulty in getting someone to videotape. I was fortunate to have a parent volunteer but I had to train her and explain what I was looking for." Another candidate expressed similar challenges: "It would have been nice to have a video camera — I had to borrow my parents'. Our school's cameras were not compatible with the microphone we bought. And videoing was a nightmare. You can never anticipate what would go wrong: the technology teacher would turn off the camera, which was considered editing; the sound would drop off, and we'd have to tape again. Technical things drove me crazy. I did a lot of tripod work in the end, which I don't know if it will hurt me." When asked what other support would have helped, a number of candidates mentioned access to color copy machines (which generated a significant cost for some) and assistance transferring from tape from digital to VHS.

External pressures on low-performing schools are also significant.

In addition to the many internal challenges that confront candidates and NBCTs at low-performing schools, informants described several external pressures and demands that also affect these schools. Among these, the following were most often cited.

External demands on low-performing schools are perceived to be greater, and are often seen as contradictory to the National Board's teaching standards.

Several informants noted that working at a low-performing school, especially in the current high-stakes accountability environment, has led to much greater scrutiny and increased pressure to implement externally-imposed changes, and to demonstrate improvement on performance indicator systems. This increased pressure transfers across roles, with teachers reporting feeling pressure from their site administrators, site administrators feeling pressure from district leaders, and district staff feeling pressure from local stakeholders and state policymakers. The resulting dynamic affected candidates in a number of key ways.

Top-down reform initiatives requiring participation are more common.

Many informants talked about reform initiatives being required by the district, and the impact this had on teachers. One high school principal described his view of the basic contradiction between National Board tenets and his district's implementation of a top-down, outside-in reform approach:

> "Teachers were not in agreement with the district's reform movement; there was an underlying rebellion against the district leadership style,

> which was 'The firings will continue until morale improves.' National Boards had much more credibility for them; it emphasized and reinforced that teacher-initiated, collegially-based, student-centered approaches were more effective than what [the] district was doing. National Board was a way to escape from [the] madness they were required to engage in.... NB was an inoculation from top-down heavy-handedness. It also had a credibility with the teachers that the district reforms didn't, because [in the latter] there was no real dialog; you had to be blindly led."

This principal expressed the desire — echoed by many informants — for more systemwide alignment and coherence in a school reform approach. As he put it, "It's very possible that within National Boards there are many things that are compatible with [our] district reform efforts...but you cannot bulldog people, you must motivate and convince them." But he warned against the potential negative effects of this contradiction. "At the district level, I'm at a loss: It seems like everyone is on the same page about Board certification, but the district still spends millions on its own professional development, while what's really good is not picked up on. It becomes a dual track, what [the] district is pursuing versus what you're doing personally as a teacher." The potential strategy of better aligning district, site, and teacher visions is discussed further in the strategies section below.

Highly scripted curricula and instructional methods are more prevalent.

A number of NBCTs and candidates voiced concern about the trend in districtwide reform efforts toward using highly scripted curricula and instructional methods. For example, one candidate described the district's impending introduction of just such a curriculum in reading, noting that it was welcomed by novice teachers but disliked by more veteran staff. This teacher pursued Board certification sooner than she had expected due to foreseen conflicts with this district reform: "Hearing about other teachers [in other districts] required to use *Open Court* prompted me to do National Boards earlier rather than later, because our district is now introducing an early [highly scripted] literacy manual...I didn't want to do my literacy entries under that constraint."

A support provider described her candidates' difficulties in completing certification entries with prescribed curricula: "Some say it's more of a challenge because they have to stay on the page, doing certain things at certain times. [The] literacy development [entry] takes place in an eight-week timeframe. Most folks wanted to show variety – poetry, non-fiction writing. With *Open Court*, it's harder for them to pick the pieces to show improvement. It's not that they thought *Open Court* wasn't going to work; they didn't feel that they could put themselves in the lesson. That was alarming to them."

Another support provider noted that the introduction of this mandated curriculum affected NB candidates "across the board." As she explained, "Many of our candidates asked, 'How can I demonstrate accomplished, standards-based teaching within the confines of this highly scripted curriculum?'" She and other support providers

recommended that candidates document these constraints in the context section of the application.

High-stakes performance indicator systems based on standardized, norm-referenced tests (NRTs) are the focus of principal attention and staff efforts.

Teachers and administrators expressed deep concern about the effect of California's Academic Performance Index[1] on the focus and quality of teaching, and on the perception of the school as doing the right things over time. One candidate stated, "In a low-performing school, all anybody cared about were the SAT-9 scores [and] making our 5% [API] increase. There was no time to help teachers pursue other avenues like the National Boards. It was not seen as a necessity; my pursuing National Board certification was not important to the school. The SAT-9 was the new principal's entire focus for the year... I think a lot of teachers are consumed with [SAT-9] testing [and] the state accountability system, which our district is really pushing."

A support provider noted similar concerns in another candidate. "So much going on in the school was toward improving test scores... That was the message from the principal and how [the candidate's colleagues] were talking. But this...wasn't fully congruent with what the [National] Board asks for, particularly with the teacher's role in implementing standards, focusing on students' work, and individually diagnosing her students. She was bobbing in a sea of people doing something different than she was."

This sense of contradiction was voiced by many teachers. As another candidate related, "It felt like [National Board] was in conflict with those [school reform] efforts, because National Board standards are so holistic, and the test-prep skill set's focus is so different. It was so contradictory, it was hard on the soul. I know we need to prepare our kids better for these tests, but there's not enough time in the day to do all of it...I had to add much more, beyond what my school required."

One notable worry voiced by several teachers concerned the possible negative short-term outcomes on such indicator systems that could occur from following NB-endorsed practices. One NBCT observed, "If I'm teaching in a very comprehensive way, being very thoughtful about how my students are responding, I'm not sure whether it will show on a standardized test...If I'm doing portfolio assessment as a new teacher, but that [standardized, norm-referenced] test comes along and I don't know anything about it, my kids may not do well." Another candidate, who had been very enthusiastic about the impact she was having on her students utilizing NB tenets, suddenly expressed doubt that it would be adequately reflected in the state's accountability system: "Forget about our target list, and our reading benchmarks, which we are doing very well in. My worst fear is that it won't be reflected in the SAT-9. Maybe we should be reconstituted; maybe we're doing everything wrong, because that's the measure that matters right now. It's scary."

[1] A school-level index which is determined entirely by non-longitudinal student performance on the Stanford-9 norm-referenced test.

Strategies and Leverage Points

In the informant interviews, several questions were asked to elicit whether there were strategies and points of leverage that might be used to increase the likelihood of success in using the NB process as an organizing framework for improving low-performing schools. Informants were quite clear and consistent in identifying these strategies and leverage points, although they were also equally clear about the difficulty both in implementing them on a schoolwide basis, and in sustaining them over time. In many cases, these strategies speak directly to the challenges and issues discussed above. While they may easily be read as recommendations, they are better understood as starting points for a discussion on how to most effectively introduce the NB assessment process into a given school and district context.

School site administrators need to understand and support the tenets and certification process of the National Board.

Several informants across different roles emphasized the need for school site administrators to understand what the NB process entails and aims to develop in teachers, and to support teachers who are pursuing candidacy in a variety of ways. Supports mentioned range from giving access to and help with technology, to freeing up candidates' time at critical junctures, providing moral encouragement, and urging parents to participate in the candidates' efforts. One support provider explained, "Principals must understand that the teacher is going through a very rigorous process, and must offer…support; most successful teachers have principals who do that extra little bit…. This is especially so for low-performing schools, because that's where teachers feel the biggest strain." Another support provider elaborated: "There needs to be greater education of the principal and assistant principal to understand that this is special, and does need extra planning. They need to take things off their [candidates'] plates; [Administrators] need to change to, 'Tell me what you need.' These teachers are spending all this extra time preparing lessons, analyzing student work. Administrators need to get used to the idea that these people may have to say 'no,' because they're not the type of people who normally say 'no.'"

Several candidates and NBCTs echoed this view, yet acknowledged the tensions inherent in the competing demands on teachers of instructional leadership at the school site and the NB assessment process. As one NBCT put it, "At low-performing schools, candidates are likely to be your leaders, so their time will be taken up, and it's important that the principal support them….[NBC candidates] are likely to be the support providers to beginning teachers at schools. So they don't feel they must abandon their colleagues to do this – that's important." Another candidate explained, "I wanted the principal to acknowledge [in public] what we're doing, so that if we're leaving school to go to a [support network] meeting, others don't think that we're just leaving early. It's in part professional respect."

Notably, these very needs and tensions were also acknowledged by both site administrators interviewed. In particular, one principal, after describing how he had become uncomfortable with candidates' requests for release time and denied them, went

on to say, "Support is needed for administrators as well. Administrators should be aware that certain things need to be available [for candidates]. [We need] some professional development and support to understand the process...."

A district union representative offered a broader interpretation of this expressed need for site administrator support, and in doing so, captured a dynamic that several teachers and support providers also described. "Especially at low-performing schools, administrators are insecure and authoritarian...so I think you need to do some training with administrators on supporting National Board candidates. If [administrators] don't feel confident, they will not support it. Given that schools are complex social systems, you cannot change one part of the system without affecting the other parts. The kind of teacher that does well in the National Board [process] is one that is not autocratic; you need to expand that circle of support out, so that there's not a conflict at the administrative level."

He went on to describe the top-down, authoritarian culture that pervades low-performing education systems, where "passive participant-taskmaster" relationships are the norm reproduced in chain-like fashion between students and teachers, teachers and principals, and principals and district administrators. To leverage the NB process schoolwide, he concluded, "you must consciously create a management culture that helps to...nurture this [NB] activity, versus the authoritarian approach, or you will have conflict. You need a district and site administration that will support the good approaches that we know work."

District administrator understanding and support is needed, particularly in regard to ensuring that district leaders' priorities, expectations, and management practices align as much as possible with NB tenets and processes.

As they noted with site leadership, several informants identified the importance of ensuring that district administrators also understand and support NB candidates, build on the expertise of NBCTs, and avoid unintentionally undermining both with contradictory initiatives and management practices.

Several informants pointed out the frequent and unfortunate juxtaposition of district priorities and expectations with those of the National Board, and suggested that alignment of the two would increase the likelihood of wider implementation of NB principles at the school level. In comparing district and NB expectations, one site administrator pointed out that "NB had much more credibility for [candidates], [as it] emphasized and reinforced that teacher-initiated, collegially-based, student-centered approaches were more effective than what the district was doing." He warned against allowing a "dual track system," with district and teacher goals conflicting, yet professed optimism about the potential for alignment. "In the last year, the district finally started getting on the bandwagon on National Board.... In the education field, many things overlap; it's very possible that within National Board there are many things that are compatible with district reform efforts."

In this site administrator's mind, the district could be much more successful in its reforms by leveraging NB standards and practices to cultivate instructional expertise from *within the school*. As he envisioned it, "If the district said, 'We're going to do National Boards, and every school will have at least three teachers become Board-certified, so that these teachers can then become on-site coaches and leaders,' that would be awesome, and lend credibility to on-site efforts."

One support provider based in a large urban district also highlighted the benefits of alignment that she saw between her district's reform efforts and NB practices: "The district's efforts have turned out to be a perk, because teachers must look at students' work, their writing and their literacy skills...and because they must be able to show what students can do and explain how they got them from here to there. [So] our reform effort has given them skills they can transfer to the National Board process... Teachers who used student portfolios are better able to prepare their own [NB] portfolios showing evidence of their students' learning... I also think the reform of the beginning teacher support process is beginning to support the National Board effort as well."

Similarly, another NB candidate, a first-grade teacher, remarked on the value of a somewhat complementary alignment in helping her focus on enriching "play time": "Given the kind of [district-level] reform happening, we are asked to be more reflective, and it flows right into National Board. Sometimes the district effort was in conflict [with National Board]...but it helped me to think about my practice, to be more judicious in how to cut and where to cut, how standards and child development go together...[to] enrich [students'] cognitive tasks within the context of play to move them to higher levels."

In addition to urging the strategic value of better aligning practices and reform efforts, several informants advocated some very concrete supports. One administrator at a large urban district was working with a local institution of higher education to help candidates receive credits toward master degrees for their efforts pursuing candidacy. Another district allowed completing the candidacy requirements to fulfill its requirements for biennial teacher evaluation (which drew resistance from one uninformed principal). Other, more material support strategies include help with video technology, offering access to "refresher" courses on subject matter content in preparation for NB assessment center exercises, and occasionally providing substitutes so candidates can visit NBCTs in their classrooms. Most often cited by NBCT and candidate informants as valuable district support, however, was the opportunity to participate in school- and district-based support networks. These are discussed next.

A tiered process of progressive involvement, leading in stages to voluntary NB candidacy, is more likely to engage larger, schoolwide support and participation.

It was clear from many of the informants that, in order to utilize National Board candidacy and certification as a central strategy for school change, a tiered process allowing progressive engagement would be needed. Noting the high percentage of novice teachers typically found at low-performing schools, a district union representative

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advised against trying to move too many of a school's teachers too quickly into candidacy. "You need staged support for newer teachers...you cannot 'cold-turkey' them...National Boards could be a crushing experience otherwise." He related the story of one novice teacher who spent three years participating in NB study groups of veteran teacher candidates, examining student work and Board standards, before she declared her candidacy.

This staged approach is already used successfully in a number of external support programs. Some programs have four tiers — from awareness of the NB process, to pre-candidacy where the teacher works on portfolio entry requirements as if they were a candidate, to candidacy where there is a set amount of time to complete the portfolio requirements and attend the assessment center, to becoming an NBCT who can then take on the role of mentoring others. As one support provider explained, "More teachers are using a pre-candidacy year, coming to us to sit in and prepare. Then they come into the program [as a candidate] the following year, doing less in their school that year since they plan to need more time for candidacy requirements. For example [Teacher 1] plans to back off other work next year, in order to concentrate on [NB candidacy]; then he'll pick up afterwards."

The key, in many informants' minds, is building this kind of collegial support *within the school.* As one support provider urged, "There must be a mentoring kind of partnership of the NBCT with the pre-candidate or candidate to see the value of what they've been through — the reflection, analyzing student work, planning units." Indeed, many candidates and NBCTs noted just this kind of staged support and collegial mentoring as being key to their pursuing and achieving certification.

One candidate emphasized how helpful it was to pursue candidacy with on-site peers both for support and for ongoing collegiality.

> "Four other [site] colleagues pursued National Board at the same time... We were a working group. We got together at someone's house and talked about the entries; as we got more into writing, we talked together at support group meetings, then exchanged entries; also recording and critiquing each other's video entries was very helpful. Clarifying and interpreting the information, because the National Board binder is confusing. When looking at an entry, and deciding how to design a learning experience, it was very helpful to talk to other teachers, to see how their [teaching] unit met the criteria, and fit with all the pieces. This pushed me to expand my own ideas. ... I became closer to my other colleagues that went through the [NB] process; we have a real bond, and we'll all be teaching second grade next year."

Another NBCT described her experience pursuing candidacy with a colleague: "My colleague was right next door. He was an English teacher as well, pursuing the same credential. Since he was a veteran teacher, it was really wonderful. We supported each other. We stayed many days until 10:30 at night preparing." Still another NBCT

advocated for peer mentoring: "That's the approach you should take; have NBCTs in pairs or groups versus individuals; this way teachers can play off each other; if you involve others, it's a whole different effect. We can share our experiences, encourage other colleagues to pursue it. The quality of dialog is critical." These testimonies contrasted sharply with the experiences of isolation and misunderstanding described by candidates who pursued NB certification alone at their school sites. Many even hid the fact that they were pursuing candidacy to avoid generating envy among colleagues.

Again echoing the need for systemic support for an entire school staff if this effort is to be fully engaged, many informants advised that a schoolwide process be undertaken. "You need a structured process; some kind of a class, almost," said one candidate. "Form a site-based support network with an agenda.... Peer coaching would also help, if it's done correctly, with NBCTs."

Although many spoke of "contagious" or "snowball" effects of having NBCTs on-site, one support provider warned there are risks to assuming that NBCTs can always lead instructional change from within their own schools. "There's a need for expertise in professional development that Board certified teachers may not have," she noted. "They're not all mentors or coaches. Professional development experts may need to be brought in initially, to open up the dialog and change the [school staff's] patterns and norms." She went on to delineate other elements that, in her view, must also be in place: "It will take more than just the National Board process alone," she noted. "There must be an impetus behind wanting to change the professional culture; it's not just going to happen spontaneously. The teacher may be a catalyst, but the rest of the elements must be in place for the chemical reaction to happen: a supportive administration, time to work together, to work with other teachers to develop a common language to discuss student work and practice that is standards-based." These elements, validated by several informants, are further discussed below.

Informants also stressed the importance of not requiring or pressuring teachers to declare candidacy. Many felt that being in a school culture where the NB standards and practices were being cultivated would inspire many to pursue candidacy eventually (or move to another school), but urged that the decision be both individual and voluntary. As one candidate summed up what several informants noted: "I don't believe you can force teachers at low-performing schools to go through this process to change their practice. The voluntary aspect [of pursuing NB certification] is absolutely important... [the process] can't be imposed on them. It's a lot of work to do, and forcing someone to do it would cause them to balk."

Use NB standards to develop a common language and understanding of teaching excellence, and "build in" time within school routines for dialog and reflection on instructional practices and student work.

Virtually all teachers and support providers identified as essential the twin strategies of using NB standards to develop a common vocabulary for teachers schoolwide to

articulate and understand exemplary teaching, and creating the time within existing school routines to discuss and reflect on instruction and student work.

As one support provider and NBCT explained, NB standards "give a common language and set of criteria to define accomplished teaching; it provides a language and a vocabulary. A lot of teachers know what good teaching is but don't know how to articulate it; this gives them a road map and criteria of what it looks like." Another support provider noted, "Developing a common language of critique is important. It's not about 'You did this well versus not well.' It's about using the [NB] standards as an analytical framework for critique, and learning how to articulate about one's practice." She further warned that "this could be very unskillfully done," and stressed that carefully facilitated discussions would be needed to "open up the professional dialog" and "break down norms of privacy of the classroom."

Several teacher informants described how they were actually carrying out these efforts at their grade levels or departments. For example, one NBCT explained that her dialog with a departmental colleague who was pursuing certification at the same time was so positive, they later solicited an IHE grant to fund all their secondary science department teachers to discuss student work and observe and reflect on each other's instructional techniques.

Interestingly, this teacher noted the positive effects this kind of dialog had on the morale of her students. "The importance and value of being with colleagues, to share and dialog, that helps the students as well," she explained. "Developing collegiality can't help but rub off on those students as well. If I lose my motivation in this, the kids know it. If I feel isolated and alone, the kids feel it. Our department is unified, and kids feel the camaraderie."

She then reflected: "I could see how [pursuing] National Board certification...could be used to leverage...time for teachers to work together. If you could use this to create time for teachers to work together and develop expertise, it could have a huge effect on kids. In a way, the National Board process can be used as a way to begin change in the culture of a department, perhaps of a whole school as well. Not just to talk about specific teaching issues, but to develop dialog, relationships, and trust in the department to tackle important issues in the school. The isolated teacher is still the norm, despite reams of research on time needed together to reform, time to work together. National Board gives a framework for the kinds of discussions that could happen during that time together. It's a starting point."

All informants without exception noted a great need for more skillful use of time within the regular school day and routines in order to discuss and reflect on what is most critical to improving instructional practices and student performance. One support provider urged there be "more time for teachers to share ideas, techniques, strategies, more built-in time, not extra time. You can't share if you don't have time to share at faculty meetings."

Ensure NBCTs have opportunities to provide instructional leadership at the grade or departmental level, as well as at the district level, so that they stay committed to the classroom.

In almost all interviews, it was clear that NBCTs and candidates tended to be strong leaders who were committed to their students, departments, and schools. Equally apparent, however, was great variability in the number and kind of opportunities they had to provide instructional leadership at the school site and within the district. Ensuring that the expertise they have developed is sufficiently recognized, cultivated, and strategically deployed emerged as a key potential leverage point in effecting school improvement.

For example, a number of NBCTs commented on the importance of receiving support and recognition from the district administration, particularly when school-level recognition was lacking. "I have been given greater opportunity, but not at school," explained one NBCT. "I received a lot more recognition at the district level than I thought I would — a lot of attention was put upon [another NBCT] and myself. In some ways we were used as examples and put on a pedestal more than I thought was good." This teacher sought and found new professional challenge in becoming a support provider for other candidates within his district.

While teachers clearly valued the positive recognition from the district or principal, they also underscored the need to have new professional challenges and responsibilities that tap their skills. One teacher stated, "Now, as a National Board Certified Teacher, you have people coming to you all the time, because of the title and stature. District people take [NBCTs] seriously, and on-site your opinion counts a bit more." Another NBCT stated that the new districtwide opportunities to provide instructional leadership have actually kept him from leaving the classroom: "At the district level, greater recognition has been given. I'm now leading a group of 30 teachers writing a guide to middle school science curriculum for the whole district... The district took the chance of putting us [two NBCTs] in charge because of our [NB] certification...National Boards has given me the avenue to pursue leadership, it's encouraged me to stay in the classroom and use my status as an NBCT to promote certain policy issues."

For other NBCTs, growing the capacity of their departments or grade levels provides ample challenge. As one NBCT offered, "I'm hoping that now there are two of us [NBCTs], we can get others to step forward. We're doing a lot of work in the science department, building a critical mass.... People are in different places along a continuum, but once they reach a certain level, National Board should be part of that progress." He concluded, "The fact that I've stayed and built a stable department, with less turnover, and more professionals, is related to National Board."

Yet another NBCT and her colleague worked hard to improve the quality of teaching in their secondary department. "We're now looked up to as the lead department. That gives us weight to throw around. We support one another. We instituted observations in department teachers' classes; we're changing the professional culture of the department slowly." However, she noted the limits of this effort within the school. "There's a much more faint effect in the wider school. The administration appreciates it, and has

consciously used ideas to get teachers to talk about their teaching. Change is slow, though."

This could also address what appears to be an ongoing tension among NBCTs working at low-performing schools. On the one hand, several teachers noted that going through the certification process had reaffirmed their original commitment to work with the lowest-performing students. One NB-certified science teacher decided to stop teaching her AP Chemistry class, because preparing for it was taking too much preparation time away from her regular classes, where she felt the students needed more help and attention. Another NBCT received offers from higher-performing schools within her district, but had refused them. "They don't need me," she explained. "I achieved National Board certification working with my kids…it's actually made me want to be with these kids stronger… Too often kids in general classes get stuck with new teachers, or not too good teachers. I will not work with other kids. I want the lowest performing." Still another NB candidate explained, "You know what kind of a teacher you are when you go to a harder class. Working at a high-performing school — those kids are so enriched, it doesn't allow you to test your mettle."

On the other hand, several recently completed candidates and NBCTs expressed frustration with the lack of opportunities for leadership and professional growth at both school and district levels. As one support provider noted, "The challenge for the National Board will be to keep teachers in the classroom." Explained one NBCT, "I don't see myself staying at the current [school] site. I really love teaching and I am not burned out or weary of that. It is the most exciting place to be in regards to education, for me. But I am starting to want to do other things that I am starting to have the opportunity to do — things that are still in the educational arena. There are new and interesting things I can have an impact on." It is precisely the recognition of accomplished expertise, broadening of professional networks, and increased awareness of "marketability" that results from becoming a member of the NBCT cadre.

Some candidates noted they were taking a "wait-and-see" stance in whether their site and district administrators would foster or stymie their change efforts, and some NBCTs indicated their intention to leave the classroom either to pursue doctoral studies or to become external network support providers themselves. Indeed, a number of our support provider informants were NBCTs who had left the classroom to deliver professional development and support. Given that these professionals are highly motivated and accomplished, there are many opportunities available to them to have an impact on education. Many did communicate a sense of impatience with systems that do not give them adequate recognition, leadership opportunities, and instructional authority. So both cultivating with ample support *and* nurturing with recognition and opportunity, these expert teachers will be particularly challenging and important for any strategy that intends to leverage NB certification to create sustained improvement in low-performing schools.

Summary and Conclusions

This exploratory study has attempted to illuminate the likely challenges to be faced, as well as strategies and leverage points of promise, in using the National Board assessment and certification process as the centerpiece of a comprehensive strategy to improve the professional culture and quality of teaching in low-performing schools. To do so, it tapped the experiences, ideas, and perspectives of 27 informants with diverse roles in the education system from across California. It also surveyed 25 support providers (many of whom were also Board certified teachers) from across the state.

What clearly emerges from the portrait painted by these informants is both enormous challenge and real promise. The challenges of utilizing the National Board's tenets and certification process are very real in low-performing, invariably high-poverty schools. There is much greater instability and unpredictability in students' and their families' lives, and frequent turnover in teaching and administrative staffs. Those teachers most likely to be ready for candidacy are also those most likely to be already over-committed to meeting the needs of their schools and more novice colleagues, and to be under-supported in material resources and by their own beleaguered school administrators. Moreover, in the current environment of high-stakes accountability as determined by standardized norm-referenced tests, poor student performance brings with it external pressures to narrow curriculum and instruction, sanctions for continued underperformance, and obligatory, top-down initiatives that may not be congruent with students' needs or exemplary instructional practices.

Nevertheless, there is also real optimism found in these interview and survey data, and several promising strategies are put forth. Informants clearly identify the need for a systemic approach that recognizes and engages with the larger context in which low-performing school systems are nested. They urge repeatedly that any effort that would build on the National Board standards, values, and assessment process must gain and sustain the understanding and support of site and district administrators. In particular, they recommend steps to ensure that site administrators invest in the time and technical support required of their teacher leaders pursuing certification, and that district administrators strive to make their professional development and school change initiatives align with (or at least not undermine) National Board tenets and practices. Informants also urge a whole-school approach that attempts to progressively involve all staff in appropriate stages, from awareness and pre-candidacy, through candidacy and certification, to mentoring and peer leadership. Such an approach would not only acknowledge and respect different developmental levels, but would also help foster a culture of collegiality and mutual support, as well as of dialog and reflection on teaching and student work using a common language and set of criteria that define accomplished practice. Using time wisely in these efforts is crucial. So too is ensuring that accomplished teachers are recognized by site, district, and community leaders, and given real opportunities to provide instructional leadership within their schools and districts.

It is perhaps best to close with the words of the candidates and National Board Certified Teachers who are currently working hard to transform their schools and mentor their colleagues and students toward success.
One candidate reflected on her experience in completing the NB process: "This whole last year has opened my eyes to opportunities at low-performing schools. I think a lot of

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it is how a community of teachers can come together to become a community of learners and commit to making a difference. Not all low-performing schools have that, but those that do will see a difference."

A Board certified teacher reflected, "There are lots of ingredients to an effective strategy. I can't say this is the solution to low-performing schools. I think they [group of NBCTs] could build a team to pursue it together. If you're going to impact school performance, you have to intersect with the culture of a school; going off and doing it by yourself will not make it happen. I did, and since then I'm bringing it back to my site, and hoping to make it more a part of the school culture."

Another NBCT concluded: "Within the school itself is an incredibly untapped talent source, even in low-performing schools. There are many great teachers who may be burned out but still have real talent. I hope you can use the National Board process along with changing the [school] structure to allow teachers time to bring about these changes. Teachers are so overwhelmed in low-performing schools with the day-to-day that they can't develop and share their talents.... [Through the NB process] I was able to identify my strengths and weaknesses, but teachers don't have that time and framework to do that. The talent still in these schools is an enormous untapped potential....We can capitalize on that."

NBPTS Certification and Low-Performing Schools: A Quick Questionnaire for NBPTS Support Network Members

Overview and Instructions: WestEd's Teacher Quality Program is about to conduct a feasibility study to assess the viability of using the National Board Certification process as a vehicle for elevating the quality of teacher practices and improving the culture of low-performing schools[1] in our region. As Support Network members, you may be able to provide us with valuable information and perspective as we begin this study.

1. Have you worked, or are you currently working, with National Board candidates who teach at low-performing schools? (Circle one)

   YES / NO _____(If Yes, please estimate how many of the candidates you have supported, or currently support, work in low-performing schools.)

2. Have you worked with National Board candidates at low-performing schools:

   a) who *completed* the application process? YES / NO

   (If Yes, please identify one *challenge* you found candidates faced working in low-performing schools.)

   _____

   _____

   b) who *earned* Board Certification? YES / NO

   If Yes,

   Did they assume a leadership role at the school? YES / NO / DON'T KNOW

   Was certification valued by school colleagues? YES / NO / DON'T KNOW

(OVER)

[1] A low-performing school in California means a school in the lower half of all schools based on the Academic Performance Index (API) rankings. API Rankings are posted at www.cde.ca.gov.

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3. To what extent do you believe that teachers at a low-performing school who pursue Board Certification can help to improve the quality of teaching at that school?

Not at All		Somewhat		To a Great Extent
1	2	3	4	5

4. To what extent do you believe that teachers at a low-performing school who pursue Board Certification can help to improve the professional culture of that school?

Not at All		Somewhat		To a Great Extent
1	2	3	4	5

5. Name one element you believe is necessary to have in place in order for the Board Certification process to make a difference at a low-performing school.

_____

_____

6. Are you willing to participate in a brief telephone interview, email survey, or focus group related to this feasibility study? YES / NO (If Yes, please provide information below.)

_____

Name Phone Email

Thank you for taking time to help!

For more information on this feasibility study, please contact Robert Linquanti at 510-302-4235 (email: rlinqua@wested.org) or Joan Peterson at 415-615-3204 (email: jpeters@wested.org).

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NBPTS Certification and Low-Performing Schools: Quick Questionnaire for NBPTS Support Network Members (3/20/01)

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS:

Resp #	Question #'s: 1	2a	2b.	2c.	2d.	3	4	6	2.a. Challenge	5. Element needed
1	N	N	N	X	X	5	5	Y	x	Support group to validate candidate's work
2	Y	N	N	Y	X	5	5	Y	High # of high-needs students in each classroom	Support of principal
3	Y	Y	Y	X	X	4	4	Y	Transient population	Understanding/reflecting standards in accomplished teaching and practice
4	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5	5	Y	Actively involving parents w/ limited time, education	Greater schoolwide understanding NBC teachers make + diff. in student achievement
5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	4	Y	Heavy workload; time is always the issue	Administration's support
6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	x	x
7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	5	Y	Low morale in school	Support from outside the school
8	N	N	X	X	X	5	5	N	x	Financial Support
9	Y	N	X	X	X	4	4	Y	x	Teacher ed. in community culture; parent participation in school
10	X	X	X	X	X	5	5	Y	x	School culture where teachers willingly talk to each other abt. instr. Practice
11	Y	N	N	X	X	4	4	N	x	Administrator support
12	Y	Y	Y	X	X	X	X	X	High demands on teacher time @school b/c already leaders in school's impr. prgs	x
13	N	N	N	X	X	5	5	Y	x	BC teachers s/b included in leadership roles on-site +/or w/in district
14	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	5	Y	Lack of support	Support by Administration & core of "likeminded" teachers
15	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5	5	Y	Videoing, lack admin. support, low expects, sporadic attend/trans., tchr. writing skills	Critical mass of NBCs & admin. knowledge, support
16	N	N	N	X	X	5	5	Y	x	Time for tchrs to reflect on practice together, plan improv. strategies
17	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	5	Y	Lack of support from district or school administrators	Administrative support, opportunities for leadership
18	Y	Y	Y	X	X	5	5	Y	Lack of resources at school	>1 NBC teacher; principal and asst. princ. who value process
19	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5	5	Y	Feared portfolios would be judged more harshly	Support of site administrator; team from site is more powerful
20	N	N	N	X	X	5	5	X	x	Collaborative school culture that draws on each staff member's expertise
21	Y	N	N	X	X	4	4	Y	x	Site administration & district support & intervention
22	Y	N	N	X	X	4	5	Y	x	Time! NBCTs need real time (not when kids are w/ subs) to really make difference
23	Y	N	N	X	X	5	5	Y	x	>Support for tchrs pursuing NBC; often leaders w/many responsib. hrd 2 focus on NB
24	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	3	4	Y	Open Court & lit. dev entry (little flex); student transiency rate, initial jealousy ($)	Need at least 1/2 teachers NBC, working 1-on-1 w/ other 1/2; strong leader
25	Y	Y	Y	X	X	4	3	X	Changing adminstrators, lack of support	Supportive administrator (talk with Chauncey)

Totals						Mean	Mean	
Y	18	12	12	9	5	4.57	4.65	19
N	5	11	9	0	2			2
X	2	2	4	16	18			4
						23 resp	23 resp	

Questions:

1. NBCs who teach at LPS; 2a. NBCs at LPS completing application; 2b. NBCs at LPS who earned cert.; 2c. Assumed leadership @school?; 2d. Cert. valued by school colleagues?; 3. Extent to which teachers pursuing NBC at LPS can improve quality of teaching (1-5); 4. ...can improve professional culture of school (1-5); 6. Willing to participate in brief phone interview, email survey, focus group.

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Summary of Findings from NBPTS Support Provider Network Questionnaire

1. Of the 25 support providers who completed the questionnaire, 18 indicated they are currently working or have worked with NB candidates who teach at low-performing schools (LPS).
2. Of those 18 support providers, 12 noted that they had candidates at LPS who completed the application.
3. All 12 of those reporting candidates at LPS completing applications also reported they had candidates at LPS who received Board certification.
4. Eight of these 12 indicated that the certified teachers at LPS assumed a leadership role at the school (not clear if causal, or if pre-existed).
5. Only 5 of those 8 indicated that Board certification was valued by the teachers' colleagues.
6. Support providers indicated a strong belief in the idea that teachers at LPS who pursue certification can help improve the quality of teaching at that school (mean 4.57 of 5, where 1 = Not at all, 5 = To a great extent). Support providers also expressed their strong belief that teachers in LPS pursuing certification can help to improve the professional culture of that school (mean 4.65) [23 of 25 responded to these questions, and there was only one instance for each question of 1 person indicating "somewhat," or 3; all others who answered rated these 4 or 5].
7. Among challenges faced by candidates working in LPS, providers noted

   a lack of support from district or school administrators;
   high demands on their time (often already involved in school improvement efforts); and
   the great needs and transiency of students, coupled with low morale and low expectations of staff.
8. Among critical elements identified as needed for the NB certification process to make a difference in LPS, support providers indicated

   greater support (moral, technical, financial) from within school (particularly from administrators) and outside school for candidates; and
   having a critical mass or core team of teachers that understand, reflect on, and dedicate time and energy to work on implementing standards of accomplished teaching.
9. Of the 25 respondents, 19 indicated they would be willing to participate in an interview, survey, or focus group related to the feasibility study.

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Interview Protocol:
National Board Candidates (NBCs)

Name:
Background:

1. What led you to pursue Board certification? (Probe on extrinsic and intrinsic motivators: money, prestige, greater teaching efficacy, greater effect on students, school site.)
   a. Did working at a low-performing school influence your decision in any way?

2. What challenges did you face in pursuing Board certification? (Probe on support from colleagues, support from administrator.)
   a. Were any of these challenges related to working at a low-performing school? If Yes: In what way(s)?

3. What support did you receive in pursuing National Board Certification? (Probe on financial, technical, time, release from other duties.)
   a. If no support: What support would you have liked to receive?

4. Were there other teachers at your school pursuing National Board Certification at the same time?
   a. If Yes: Was this helpful to you?
   b. If Yes: In what way(s)?
   c. If No: Why not?

5. Were there other teachers at your school that were already National Board certified while you were pursuing certification?
   d. If Yes: Was this helpful to you in any way?
   e. If Yes: In what way(s)?
   f. If No: Why not?

6. Were there any significant reform (improvement) efforts happening at your school site while you were a Board candidate?
   a. If Yes: Did you participate in these efforts at your school site while a candidate?
   b. If Yes: In what ways? To what extent?
   c. If No: Why not?

7. Did undertaking the candidate process help you to participate in or contribute to your school's reform efforts?
   a. If Yes: In what way(s)? To what extent?
   b. If No: Why not?

8. Do you see yourself staying at your current [low-performing] school site?
   a. If Yes: Why?
   b. If No: Why not?

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c. Has your decision been influenced by the insights you gained through pursuing Board certification? If Yes: In what way(s)?

9. Do you believe the National Board assessment process can be used as part of a strategy to:
   a. Change the professional culture of a low-performing school?
   b. Improve a school's performance?
   c. In your view, what would need to be in place to make such an effort workable?

10. Is there anything else you wish to say related to this topic?

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Interview Protocol:
National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs)

Name:
Interviewed by:
Background:

1. What led you to pursue Board certification? (Probe on extrinsic and intrinsic motivators: money, prestige, greater teaching efficacy, greater effect on students, school site.)
   a. Did working at a low-performing school influence your decision in any way?

2. What challenges did you face in pursuing Board certification? (Probe on support from colleagues, support from administrator.)
   a. Were any of these challenges related to working at a low-performing school? If Yes: In what way(s)?

3. Having become Board certified, do you believe your potential has increased to:
   a. Improve the *quality of teaching* at your school?
   b. Improve the *professional culture* of your school?
   c. Improve *student achievement* at your school?
   d. If Yes: Can you provide an example or two?

4. What influence or impact do you believe you have had at your school since becoming Board certified?
   a. On your teaching colleagues?
   b. On decision making at your school?
   c. On parents of students at your school?

5. Have you been given greater opportunities to provide or assume leadership at your school since becoming Board certified?
   a. If Yes: Please give an example or two.
   b. If No: Why do you think this has not happened?

6. Were there any significant reform (improvement) efforts happening at your school site while you were a Board candidate?
   a. If Yes: Did you participate in these efforts at your school site while a candidate?
   b. If Yes: In what ways? To what extent?
   c. If No: Why not?

7. Do you see yourself staying at your current [low-performing] school site?
   a. If Yes: Why?
   b. If No: Why not?
   c. Has your decision been influenced by the insights you gained through pursuing Board certification? If Yes: In what way(s)?

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8. Do you believe the National Board assessment process can be used as part of a strategy to…
   a. …change the professional culture of a low-performing school?
   b. …improve a school's performance?
   c. In your view, what would need to be in place to make such an effort workable?

9. Is there anything else you wish to say related to this topic?

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Interview Protocol:
District Union Representative

Name:
Interviewed by:
Background:

1. What is your understanding of the process teachers commit to when pursuing National Board Certification?

2. Do you, in your capacity as a teacher union representative, support the National Board Certification process for teachers in low-performing schools?
   a. If Yes: Why? In what way(s)?
   b. If No: W hy not?

3. What support, if any, do you believe candidates should receive in pursuing the National Board assessment process?
   a. Have their application fees paid? By whom?
   b. Receive more release time?
   c. Be relieved from other district- or school-mandated responsibilities?
   d. Are any of these supports particularly needed for teachers at low-performing schools? If Yes: Why?

4. What additional compensation, if any, do you believe National Board Certified teachers should receive?
   a. If additional compensation seen as justified: What is it about National Board certification that you value?

5. Do you believe the National Board assessment process can be used as part of a strategy to:
   a. Change the professional culture of a low-performing school?
   b. Improve a school's performance?
   c. In your view, what would need to be in place to make such an effort workable?
   d. In what ways might teacher unions assist in such an effort?
   e. What are the potential pitfalls from a union perspective?

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Interview Protocol:
District Administrator (Professional Development, C & I, or other)

Name:
Interviewed by:
Background:

1. What is your understanding of the process teachers commit to when pursuing National Board Certification?

2. Was there any benefit to your district in having one (or more) of your teachers pursue National Board Certification?
   a. If Yes: In what way(s)?
   b. If No: Why not? [NOTE: MAY BE BOTH A AND B]

3. Was your district able to provide support to the National Board candidate(s)?
   a. If Yes: What kind of support(s)? (Probe on financial/other material support; relief from other duties.)
   b. If No: Why not?

4. Were there any costs to your district to having a teacher (or teachers) pursue National Board Certification?
   a. If Yes: What were they? (Probe on tangible ($) and intangible (non-participation) costs.)

5. Were there any significant districtwide reform (improvement) efforts happening during the past year that required active teacher participation?
   a. If Yes: Did any candidate(s) participate in these efforts while pursuing Board Certification?
   b. If Yes: Did any NBCTs participate in these efforts?
   c. If Yes: In what ways? To what extent?
   d. If No: Why not?

6. Did undertaking the Board Certification process help the teacher(s) to participate in or contribute to your district's reform efforts?
   a. If Yes: In what way(s)? To what extent? (Probe on how complementary.)
   b. If No: Why not? (Probe on certification process impeding participation.)

7. [For districts with NBC Teacher(s):] Has your district given these teachers greater opportunities to assume leadership since becoming Board Certified? In the district's reform efforts?
   a. If Yes: Have they taken on that leadership? If Yes: In what way(s)?
   b. f No [to main question or to 7a]: Why not?
   c. Has the district given the NBCTs any other kind of recognition?

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8. Would you encourage other teachers at your district to pursue NBC?
   a. If Yes: Why?
   b. If No: Why not?

9. Do you believe the National Board assessment process can be used as part of a strategy to
   a. Change the professional culture of a low-performing school?
   b. Improve a school's performance?
   c. In your view, what would need to be in place to make such an effort workable?
   d. In what ways might district personnel assist in such an effort?
   e. What are the potential pitfalls from a district perspective?

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Interview Protocol:
Support Provider Network Member

Name:
Interviewed by:
Background:

1. What challenges did your teachers who work at low-performing schools face in pursuing National Board Certification?
   a. Were any of these challenges greater than or different from those of candidates in schools that were not low performing?
   b. If Yes: In what way(s)?

2. What additional support do you believe National Board candidates working at low-performing schools need to be successful?

3. Have you worked with National Board candidates who have participated in school reform (improvement) efforts while pursuing Board Certification?
   a. If Yes: In what ways? To what extent?
   b. If candidates did not participate: Why not?

4. Did undertaking the Board Certification process help the teacher(s) to participate in or contribute to the school's reform efforts?
   a. If Yes: In what way(s)? To what extent?
   b. If No: Why not?

5. Do you believe the National Board assessment process can be used as part of a strategy to
   a. Change the professional culture of a low-performing school?
      If Yes: In what way(s)?
   b. Improve the quality of teaching at a low-performing school?
      If Yes: In what way(s)?
   c. Improve a school's performance? If Yes: In what way(s)?
   d. In your view, what would need to be in place to make such an effort workable?
   e. In what ways might support providers assist in such an effort?
   f. What are the potential pitfalls from your perspective?

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Interview Protocol:
School Administrator (Principal)

Name:
Interviewed by:
Background:

1. What is your understanding of the process teachers commit to when pursuing National Board Certification?

2. Was there any benefit to your school in having one (or more) of your teachers pursue National Board Certification?
   a. If Yes: In what way(s)?
   b. If No: Why not? [NOTE: MAY BE BOTH A AND B]

3. Was your school able to provide support to the National Board candidate(s)?
   a. If Yes: What kind of support(s)? (Probe on financial/other material support; relief from other duties; release time.)
   b. If No: Why not?

4. Were there any costs to your school to having a teacher (or teachers) pursue National Board Certification?
   a. If Yes: What were they? (Probe on tangible ($) and intangible (non-participation) costs.)

5. Were there any significant reform (improvement) efforts happening at your school site during the past year [i.e., while the candidate(s) pursued Board Certification]?
   a. If Yes: Did the candidate(s) participate in these efforts at your school site while pursuing Board Certification?
   b. If Yes: In what ways? To what extent?
   c. If No: Why not?

6. Did undertaking the Board Certification process help the teacher(s) to participate in or contribute to your school's reform efforts?
   a. If Yes: In what way(s)? To what extent? (Probe on how complementary.)
   b. If No: Why not? (Probe on certification process impeding participation.)

7. Was there an outside technical assistance/professional development provider that worked closely with your school in its reform efforts?
   a. If Yes: Can you provide their name and phone/email contact information?

[Questions 8 and 9 are for administrators who have NBC Teacher(s)]

8. Has this teacher participated in or contributed to school improvement efforts since becoming Board certified?

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9. Has s/he been given greater opportunities to provide or assume leadership at the school since becoming Board certified? In the school's improvement efforts?
   a. If Yes: Have they taken on that leadership? If Yes: In what way(s)?
   b. If No [to main question or to 9a]: Why not?

10. Would you encourage other teachers at your school to pursue NBC?
    a. If Yes: Why?
    b. If No: Why not?

11. Do you believe the National Board assessment process can be used as part of a strategy to:
    a. Change the professional culture of a low-performing school?
    b. Improve a school's performance?
    c. In your view, what would need to be in place to make such an effort workable?

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